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ABSTRACT

A study focused on investigating perceptions of sexist humor, specifically on how people perceive others' reactions to sexist humor. Subjects, 206 college men and women, rated communication competence and attraction of actors in vignettes depicting 2 different reactions to sexist humor. Results indicated that sex of both the joke teller and the joke reactor significantly affect outsiders perceptions of competence and attraction with women appearing to have a greater latitude of acceptable behavior than men. Findings suggest that men should refrain from telling anti-female sexist jokes because they have little to gain but much to lose if the joke is poorly received; and that women who are offended by humor should call attention to it since there was no evidence that this face-threatening act is likely to be seen as incompetent or unattractive. (Contains 33 references and 6 tables of data. The survey instrument is attached.) (Author/RS)

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# Reactions to sexist humor: An exploratory analysis from a meta-perspective

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ABSTRACT

Two hundred six college men and women rated communication competence and attraction of actors in vignettes depicting two different reactions to sexist humor. Results suggest that sex of both the joke teller and the joke reactor significantly affect outsiders perceptions of competence and attraction with women appearing to have a greater latitude of acceptable behavior than men. The implications for detouring the use of sexist humor are discussed.

## Introduction

The importance of humor cannot be overstated. A life without any humor and laughter would hardly be worth living. Even on bad days, most of us can look forward to at least a few brief moments of comic relief. An examination of past literature reveals significant positive correlations between humor and a variety of educational and social outcomes. For example, humor has been positively associated with affective learning (Gorham & Christophel, 1990), cognitive learning (Ascough, Ettinger, & Nelson, 1971), creative thinking (Ziv, 1983), conflict termination in adjusted couples (Alberts, 1990), group work efficiency (Pollio & Bainum, 1983), perceptions of message organization and credibility (Jones & Knepper, 1991), and even good health (Carroll, 1990). However, not all humor is positive.

Sexist humor has been studied for many years. Most of the studies deal with gender differences in the appreciation and use of sexist humor (Moore, Griffiths, & Payne, 1987; Pearson, 1984; Pearson, Miller, & Senter, 1983; Priest & Wilhelm, 1974), and the appropriateness of sexist humor in the workplace (Hemmasi, Graf, & Russ, 1994; Smeltzer & Leap, 1988). With awareness of sexual harassment growing and the realization that this is a problem, people are looking for ways to stop it.

One obvious display of sexism is the sexist joke. On first glance, it might seem harmless enough, even humorous, but it seems that sexist humor can put people in a double bind. How should individuals react if the humor makes them uncomfortable?

Should they laugh it off, or should they attempt to negatively reinforce the joke teller in some way and risk being perceived as a person who needs to "lighten up?" The present study fills a gap in the research because its focus is on investigating perceptions of sexist humor, but on how people perceive others' reactions to sexist humor.

## Review of Literature

This section will first define sexist humor and discuss why it is so problematic, particularly concerning the double bind dilemma. Next, the literature on sexist humor and reactions to sexist humor will be reviewed. Third, face management theory will be introduced to help frame the discussion. Finally, the use of communication competence and social attraction measures to measure perceptions of reactions to sexist humor will be investigated.

### The Problem with Sexist Humor

Bergmann (1986) concisely defines sexist humor as "humor in which sexist beliefs, attitudes, and/or norms either must be held in order to perceive an incongruity or are used to add to the fun effect of the incongruity (p. 70)". Bergman (1986) convincingly argues that sexist humor is an insult.

> It is the insult of finding fun in an episode when part of the stage-setting that we have contributed to the episode, and that is necessary to the fun, hurts someone...Whenever somebody tells or laughs at a sexist joke it is an insult to those people who have been hurt and who will be hurt by

sexist beliefs, whether the insult is intended or not (p. 79).

Sexist humor perpetuates gender inequality by hindering and ridiculing efforts to change the status quo (Bill & Naus, 1992). When individuals label sexist incidents as humorous, they escape criticism because they are dismissed as harmless. This is dangerous because it takes the serious issue of sexism, and undermines that seriousness so that any controversy is ignored. Sexist humor carries undertones that are harmful to society as a whole. To curtail the usage of sexist humor, joke tellers must be made aware that their humor is not appropriate and why it might not be appreciated. This, however, is easier said than done.

Sexist jokes can situate the audience in an awkward position. The double bind is this: if a person laughs at a sexist joke, their laughter will most likely be construed as approval of the joke and the attitude the joke conveys (whether that approval is real or not); if a person chooses not to laugh at the sexist joke or to negatively reinforce the joke teller in some way, that person could be seen as lacking a sense of humor. Common responses to negative appraisals of sexist jokes include, "What's the matter? Can't you take a joke?", or "It's all in fun, where's your sense of humor?"

Indeed, people who tell sexist jokes can always fall back on the excuse that they were "only joking." Unfortunately, this can serve to exacerbate the problem. This produces a peculiar

situation in social communication. Listeners are convinced that what was said was what was intended. The joke teller, on the other hand, argues that what was intended was not what was received" (Johnson, 1990, p. 1051). People do laugh at offensive jokes told in social settings so as not to introduce awkwardness. Laughing at an offensive joke is seen as more excusable than actually telling such a joke (Johnson, 1990).

But sexist humor is not funny to women who experience oppression every day of their lives. The "only joking" defense does not work because, as Bergmann (1986) argues, the joke is not an isolated incident but one of many that use social attitudes toward women to harm and belittle. "What we are discussing here is but the tip of an iceberg...-which has frozen out women, ethnic minorities,...those without power generally" (Latting, 1994, p. 482).

Appreciation of Sexist Humor

Appreciation of sexist humor depends on many variables: the sex of the joke teller, the sex of the listener, the sex role attitudes of the people involved and the reactions of the people involved. Findings in this area have been somewhat inconclusive.

Some research finds that appreciation of sexist humor depends on the sex of both the victim and the evaluator (Love & Deckers, 1989). Appreciation of aggressive sexist humor depends on how much the evaluator identifies with the aggressor, not the victim. Men find anti-female jokes funnier and women find anti-

male jokes funnier (Chapman, & Gadfield, 1976; Hemmasi et al., 1994; Priest & Wilhelm, 1974).

Intuitively, this may seem accurate, but other studies show that men simply find sexist jokes funnier than women find them despite the gender of the victim (see Love & Deckers, 1989). Cantor (1976) found that both men and women find female-disparaging humor to be significantly funnier than male-disparaging humor. Replication and extension of Cantor's (1976) study failed to find this and the researchers argued that one reason may be a shift away from female-disparaging humor in general (Butland & Ivy, 1990).

Hemmasi et al. (1994) found respondents rated sexist jokes against females as the most offensive of all joke types tested. Their findings also indicate that sexist humor is perceived as more dangerous in the workplace than sexual humor. Moore, Griffiths, and Payne (1987) concludes from the results of their study that tolerance for anti-female sexist humor is decreasing more quickly for women than for men.

Smeltzer & Leap (1988) raise the question of whether an offensive joke can be accepted but not appreciated. According to Bergman (1986), the answer is yes. She claims that being aware of a sexist belief and holding that belief are two different things. People can understand why a joke is supposed to be funny, but still not appreciate the joke.

A significant negative correlation exists between perceiving a sexist incident as humorous and perceiving that incident as

sexist (Bill & Naus, 1992; Love & Deckers, 1989). Respondents who find a sexist incident to be humorous also find the attitudes expressed in the incident to be acceptable.

The previously discussed studies have all addressed appreciation of sexist humor from the receivers point of view (i.e., whether a joke is found funny, sexist etc.). However, little research examines reactions to sexist humor and no research investigate perceptions of those reactions to sexist humor. These areas could provide valuable insight into the best manner in which to handle sexist humor.

As researchers who realize the negative effects of sexist humor, we would love to stop it. The obvious solution would be to first, not use sexist humor, and second to negatively reinforce people who use sexist humor in our presence. Unfortunately, this response might be oversimplified considering the pressures individuals feel in social situations. In other words, being perceived as likeable or as appropriate in the situation might take precedence over doing what seems morally correct. The main purpose of this study is to examine how an individual's response to a sexist joke affects others' perceptions of their communication competence and social attractiveness.

A Face Management Perspective

A face management perspective can provide an important theoretical framework for examining the dilemma of reacting to sexist humor. According to Brown and Levinson (1978), "All

competent adult members of a society have (and know each other to have) 'face', the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself" (p.66). From this perspective, telling any type of joke is a risky endeavor since the teller risks damage to his or her face. Therefore, reactions to sexist humor are inextricably tied to face management. Laughing along with a sexist joke has the effect of protecting the teller's face, whereas calling attention to its offensive nature can be seen as a face threatening act, which can result in losing face (Goffman, 1955).

Measures of Competence and Attractiveness

Communication competence has served as an heuristic concept in communication-related fields. It has been linked to social self esteem, anxiety, use of conflict strategies, loneliness, and small group communication (Cupach & Spitzberg, 1983; Cupach, 1982; Keyton, 1986; Spitzberg & Canary. Reactions to sexist humor should logically be also related to perceptions of competence in an interaction.

The two underlying themes of communication competence are the appropriateness of one's communication and the effectiveness of one's communication (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984). Appropriateness refers to the impression that the communication act does not violate any expectations or rules. Spitzberg and Cupach (1983) argue that "relationally competent interaction accomplishes objectives but does so in a way that does not violate bounds of acceptability established in the interpersonal

context" (p. 4). As discussed previously, telling sexist jokes and reacting to sexist jokes can produce an awkward, face-threatening social situation, in which the rules and expectations are unclear, making communication competence a central variable for this study. The Rating of Alter Competence (RAC) scale is of particular use in this study because it assesses a particular situation rather than a global trait of competence.

Interpersonal attractiveness was operationalized by McCroskey and Mccain's (1974) scale. Although the scale measures three types of attractiveness (physical, social, and task), social attractiveness, or likability, is clearly most applicable in the present study. Individuals in a situation where sexist humor is used may feel pressured to respond in a certain way to gain or retain social attractiveness. In other words, if an individual thinks that their social attractiveness (likability) might decrease by reacting negatively to sexist humor (threatening face), they might refrain.

Given a particular scenario in which sexist humor is used and evaluated, outsiders (respondents) should be able to assess both the teller and the receiver's competence and social attractiveness. These perceptions are central to this study. The findings in the previous section concerning sexist humor are inconclusive. Similarly, there has been no research that tests perceptions of reactions to sexist humor leaving it unclear what is appropriate, effective and socially attractive. Therefore, we forward the following research questions:

**RQ1:** Who will find the joke funnier, men or women?

**RQ2:** Will a person who reacts negatively to a sexist joke (by saying the joke is offensive) be perceived as more competent or less competent than a person who reacts positively (laughs at the sexist joke)?

**RQ2a:** Will a person who reacts negatively to a sexist joke (by saying the joke is offensive) be perceived as more socially attractive or less socially attractive than a person who reacts positively (laughs at the sexist joke)?

Based on findings that people who find a sexist joke funny also find the attitudes expressed in the joke to be acceptable (Bill & Naus, 1992) we forward the following hypotheses:

**H1:** Respondents who find a sexist joke funny will rate a person who responds negatively to the joke as less competent than a person who reacts positively to the joke.

**H1a:** Respondents who find a sexist joke funny will rate a person who responds negatively to the joke as less socially attractive than a person who reacts positively to the joke.

Based on findings that telling a sexist joke is a bigger offense than laughing at a sexist joke (Johnson, 1990) we forward these hypotheses:

**H2:** The person in the scenario who tells the sexist joke will be viewed as less competent than the character who laughs at the sexist joke.

**H2a:** The person in the scenario who tells the sexist joke will be viewed as less socially attractive than the character who laughs at the sexist joke.

## Method

### Respondents

Two hundred six undergraduate students at a midwestern university completed the survey instrument. The sample consisted of 110 females and 96 males. The mean age was 19.54. The class rank breakdown was 45% first year students (n=92), 30% sophomores (n=62), 15% juniors (n=30), and 10% seniors (n=21), one graduate student was also included in the sample. All students were told their participation was voluntary and anonymous.

### Instrument and Procedure

Four versions of a survey instrument were created: two in which the reaction to a sexist joke was positive (laughter and a reply of "that's pretty funny"), and two in which the reaction to the sexist joke was negative (an irritated look and a reply of "you thought that was funny? It sounds like a slam against women to me"). The sex of both the joke teller and the joke receiver was manipulated, with each of the four versions between two cross-sexed college friends (Michael and Rachel). Besides the response to the sexist joke, and the sex of the teller and receiver, the conversation was identical in all four scenarios. Here is a summary of the four versions as they will be referred to in the results:

Version I - Michael tells the sexist joke and Rachel laughs

Version II - Rachel tells the sexist joke and Michael laughs

Version III - Michael tells the sexist joke and Rachel claims it was offensive to women.

Version IV - Rachel tells the sexist joke and Michael claims it was offensive to women.

The actual sexist joke was taken from a study done by Hemmasi et al. (1994). The joke was female disparaging and was consistently rated offensive by both men and women.

After reading the scenario, respondents rated both the joke teller and the joke receiver on perceived communication competence and interpersonal attraction. All questions used a Likert-type 7 point scale (1=very strongly disagree to 7=very strongly agree). Communication competence items were adapted from both the Rating of Alter Competence (RAC) measure and Self-Rated Competence (SRC) measure developed by Cupach and Spitzberg (1981). The SRC questions employed were those most relevant to the conversation in the scenario (e.g., "Michael seemed to be an effective conversationalist", "Rachel seemed to express herself clearly"). Respondents then rated the social attractiveness of both the joke teller and the joke receiver using McCroskey and McCain's three question social attractiveness sub-scale. The final question assessed the perceived funniness of the joke told in the scenario. (Please see the appendix for the complete survey.)

The reliability scores for the RAC and SRC have been consistently high (between .90 and .93 using Cronbach's alpha)

and much research substantiates claims of excellent validity (see Spitzberg, 1988 for a review). Although not as high as previous research, high alpha levels were obtained in this study for ratings of both Michael's and Rachel's competence (.83 and .82 respectively). Similarly, past research has found McCroskey and McCain's social attractiveness sub-scale to be very reliable with an alpha of .93 (Wheeless, Frymier, & Thompson, 1991). Cronbach's alphas indicated excellent reliability for this scale in the present study for both Michael's and Rachel's competence (.92 and .91 respectively).

## Results

### Research Question One

In order to answer research question one, a T-test was employed. The analysis proved significant ($t = 2.43$, $df = 204$, $p < .017$), and suggested that men found the joke funnier ($M = 4.7$, $SD = 1.8$) than did women ($M = 4.05$, $SD = 1.9$).

### Analysis of Competence and Attraction

In order to answer the remaining research questions and the two hypotheses concerning the perceived communication competence and perceived social attractiveness of Michael and Rachel (the two characters in the various versions), four 2 x 4 x 2 factorial ANOVAs were employed. The first two ANOVAs assessed perceived communication competence for Rachel and Michael. The second two ANOVAs assessed perceived social attractiveness for Rachel and Michael. All four ANOVAs employed examined the sex of the respondent, version and perceived funniness (perceived funny/



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perceived no funny) as the independent variables. The independent variable perceived funniness was created by employing a median split for ratings of funniness. See Table 1 and Table 2 for an analysis of variance summary for Michael and Rachel's ratings of competence and social attractiveness.

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insert table 1 about here

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insert table 2 about here

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For the cases where main effects for version, or interaction effects with version were found, oneway ANOVAs were employed with a Scheffe post-hoc procedure to better ascertain the differences. See tables 3-6 for a complete summary of significant mean differences by version for Michael and Rachel's ratings of communication competence and social attractiveness.

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insert remaining tables (tables 3 - 6) about here

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Research Question Two and Research Question Two(A)

Research question two asks whether a person who reacts negatively to a sexist joke (by saying the joke is offensive) will be perceived as more or less competent than a person who reacts positively (laughs at a sexist joke)? The general evidence suggested that neither reaction is perceived as more competent. Although significant main effects existed for the version, one-way ANOVAs provided evidence that for both Michael and Rachel, there were not significant differences whether they laughed at the joke or complained about the joke.

Research question two(a) asked whether a person who reacts negatively to a sexist joke (by saying the joke is offensive) will be perceived as more or less socially attractive than a person who reacts positively (laughs at a sexist joke)? For Michael, there is evidence that he is better off laughing at a joke than reacting negatively to it in terms of his perceived social attractiveness. A one-way ANOVA indicated that he is perceived as significantly less socially attractive in the version in which he reacts negatively (saying the joke is offensive) compared to any of the other versions (see table 5).

Hypothesis One and Hypothesis One(A)

Hypothesis one predicts that respondents who find a joke funny will rate a person who reacts negatively to a joke as less competent than when a person reacts positively to a joke. Statistical results did not support this prediction.

Interestingly though, for those respondents who found the

joke least funny, they found Michael more competent when he laughed at the sexist joke told by Rachel compared to when he told the joke himself, regardless of Rachel's reaction (see table 3 and 4).

Hypothesis one(a) predicts that respondents who find the joke funny will rate a person who reacts negatively to the joke as less socially attractive than when a person reacts positively to the joke. This hypothesis is supported for Michael, although, again, not for Rachel. One-way ANOVAs with a post-hoc Scheffe procedure indicated that for those respondents who found the joke funny, Michael was perceived as least socially attractive when he criticized Rachel's joke, as compared to any of the three other versions. (see table 5 and table 6).

Hypothesis Two and Hypothesis Two(A)

Hypothesis two predicts that a person who tells a sexist joke will be viewed as less competent than a person who laughs at a sexist joke. There is some support for this hypothesis, at least for the male character (Michael). There is a main effect for version on ratings of Michael's communication competence. A one-way ANOVA with a Scheffe post-hoc procedure reveals that Michael was viewed as significantly less competent when he tells the joke, and Rachel points out its offensiveness, than when he laughs at Rachel telling the same sexist joke (see table 3).

Hypothesis two(a) predicts that a person who tells a sexist joke will be viewed as less socially attractive than a person who laughs at the joke. This hypothesis is not supported. Results

of the ANOVAs suggest there is no significant difference between telling a sexist joke and laughing at the joke for both Michael and Rachel.

## Discussion

The results of this study are thought provoking, although somewhat disconcerting. In this section, we discuss the results of our investigation, first by examining the individual research questions and hypotheses. Next limitations of the current study are addressed, along with areas of future research. Finally, we offer a general summary with implications and recommendations.

Research question one asked who would find the anti-female sexist joke funnier, men or women? Results indicated that men found the anti-female joke significantly funnier than women found it. This is consistent with the literature that suggests that men find anti-female jokes funnier than women find them (Chapman & Gadfield, 1976; Hemmasi et al., 1994; Priest & Wilhelm, 1974), but is less consistent with research suggesting no such differences (Cantor, 1976; Love & Deckers, 1989).

Research question two asked if a person who reacts negatively to a sexist joke will be perceived as more or less competent than a person who reacts positively to a sexist joke? Results indicate that reactions to sexist humor do not affect outsider's perceptions of communication competence. In other words, neither Michael nor Rachel (the two characters that were manipulated in the various versions) were rated differently when they laughed than when they criticized the joke.

However, it is interesting to note the significant difference that did occur with respect to competence. For those respondents who found the joke least funny, Michael is perceived as significantly more competent when he saves face and laughs at the joke told by Rachel than when he tells the joke himself (regardless of Rachel's reaction). This finding suggests that men risk more than women in instigating sexist humor because they might be perceived as less competent if the joke is perceived as not funny.

Finally, it is noteworthy that Rachel's competence is not affected in any of the four versions. Indeed, it appears that the latitude of perceived competent behavior for the female character (Rachel) is greater than for the male character (Michael). If she tells the joke, even when the joke is poorly received, perceptions of her competence are not negatively affected. Perhaps this is true because she is a woman and it is seen as acceptable to poke fun at oneself (Smeltzer & Leap, 1988). If she laughs at the sexist joke, perceptions of her communication competence stay the same, possibly for the same reason. Finally, if she does not laugh, she is still rated no worse, most likely because she is viewed as being assertive and sticking up for herself. With an anti-female joke, perceptions of a female's communication competence remain stable across behavior.

Research question two(a) asked if a person who reacts negatively will be perceived as more or less socially attractive

than a person who reacts positively to a sexist joke? Results suggest that overall, perceptions of a female's social attractiveness is not affected by reaction to the joke but a male's is. Overall, Rachel's social attractiveness did not change regardless of her reaction, but Michael was perceived as significantly less attractive when he did not laugh at Rachel's joke than when he did. This finding might suggest that it is more beneficial for a man to laugh at an anti-female joke (save face) than to call negative attention to it (to threaten face). Furthermore, this finding adds support to the notion that females have greater behavioral latitude in terms of reacting to anti-female sexist humor.

Hypothesis one predicted that respondents who found the joke funny would rate the person who responded negatively to the joke as less competent than the person who responded positively to the joke. Results indicated that the hypothesis was false. For those respondents who found the joke most funny, no differences in perceptions of competence for either Rachel or Michael, regardless of their reaction, were detected.

As noted in the results section, for those who found the joke least funny, Michael was perceived as more competent when he laughed at the sexist joke told by Rachel compared to when he told the joke himself, regardless of Rachel's reaction (see table 3 and 4). This is likely due to respondents' appreciation of Michael's attempt to save Rachel's face, since as earlier noted, Rachel has greater behavioral flexibility to tell a "bad" joke

without it being offensive. As noted before, respondents not finding the joke funny, did not give Michael the same latitude (in perceived competence) to tell such a joke.

There was, however, support for hypothesis one(a), which predicted that respondents who found the joke funny would rate the person who responded negatively to the joke as less socially attractive than the person who responded positively to the joke. For those respondents who found the joke funny, Michael was perceived as least socially attractive when he criticized Rachel's joke compared to any of the other three versions. Once again, respondents appeared to be most unimpressed with Michael when threatening Rachel's face.

With the results of hypothesis one and hypothesis one(a), we once again see that for Rachel, there existed a greater latitude of acceptable behavior in her telling a sexist joke, and her reactions to the telling of such a joke. On the other hand, perceptions of Michael's social attractiveness were once again significantly influenced by his reaction to the sexist joke. Consistent with research question two(a), Michael again benefits from laughing at an anti-female sexist joke told by a woman.

Hypothesis two predicted that a person who tells a sexist joke will be viewed as less competent than a person who laughs at the joke. Results did indicate that again, for Michael, there is support for this hypothesis. As reported before, Michael was viewed as significantly less competent when he tells a joke that

is poorly received by Rachel than when Rachel tells that same joke and he laughs.

Hypothesis two(a) predicted that a person who tells a sexist joke will be viewed as less socially attractive than a person who laughs at the joke. This hypothesis was not supported. Statistical evidence provided no indication that this was the case for either person in the scenarios.

## Limitations and Future Research

One limitation lies in assuming that the people who did not find the joke funny, thought it was sexist. We did not ask whether respondents viewed the joke as sexist or not. However, Hemmasi et al. (1994) did find the anti-female joke to be rated consistently offensive by both men and women. Furthermore, asking a question concerning the sexist nature of the joke might have served to bias responses.

A second limitation lies in the notion that biological sex might not be the most accurate way to measure our variables. Psychological gender, which reflects attitudes and beliefs might have been another way answering our questions. For example, Moore, et al. (1987) found that both men and women with nontraditional views of sex roles appreciated sexist humor less than men and women with more traditional views. However, respondents, regardless of their psychological gender, were rating the characters in the scenario based on the character's sex not gender.

This study, being exploratory in nature, provides many directions for future study. Future research should examine reactions to sexist humor with males as the butt of the joke. Pearson et al. (1983), contrary to their expectations, found that joke-tellers of both sexes told more anti-male jokes than anti-female jokes. As the literature suggests, reactions to anti-female jokes might be perceived differently than reactions to anti-male jokes.

Similarly, future research could use scenarios that include same-sex dyads in addition to opposite-sex dyads. Smeltzer and Leap (1988) point out that people who can poke fun at themselves are seen as having more of a sense of humor, subsequently, those who cannot (a female not laughing at a sexist joke told by another female) are seen as lacking a sense of humor. Smeltzer and Leap (1988) also argue that a sexist joke might indeed be more appropriate if told by a woman in a group of women, than if told by a man in a mixed-sex group. Manipulating all these variables in one study, however, could be extremely labor intensive and would require a very large sample.

Finally, this research could be fruitfully extended to examine reactions to racist jokes and other offensive humor. This study could also be replicated using an organization as the setting and professionals as opposed to students as respondents. Power, expectations, and the legal ramifications of sexist humor most certainly differ from interpersonal to organizational settings.

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Summary, Implications, and Recommendations

The most obvious and important conclusion from this study is that where social attractiveness and communication competence are concerned with regard to sexist humor, women appear to have a greater latitude of behavior than men. The implication is that the person who is the butt of the joke (in this case, a woman) has earned the right to tell the joke, as well as having the right to choose whether she appreciates it or finds it offensive.

The second major finding in this study is that perceptions of both competence and social attractiveness were found to be more positive for men when they laugh at sexist humor than when they don't laugh or when they tell the joke. This finding, although consistent with a face management perspective, is disconcerting because it suggests that males might feel pressure to reinforce anti-female sexist jokes by laughing at them if the teller is female. While we already suggested that men refrain from telling sexist jokes, it seems that laughing at such jokes told by women might positively affect their image. This is unfortunate since this makes it more likely for future production of such humor.

Overall, results of this study lead us to assert two important recommendations concerning anti-female sexist humor. First, men should refrain from telling anti-female sexist jokes because have little to gain, but much to lose if the joke is poorly received. Second, women who are offended by humor should call attention to it since there was no evidence that this face

threatening act is likely to be seen as incompetent or unattractive. If they do not call such attention, they are arguably perpetuating the use of sexist humor and the harm it brings to women.

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APPENDIX

PLEASE LET US INTRODUCE OURSELVES! WE ARE TWO Ph.D STUDENTS FROM THE SCHOOL OF INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION WHO WOULD TREMENDOUSLY APPRECIATE YOUR ASSISTANCE IN COMPLETING THIS SURVEY!!!

THE GOAL OF THIS RESEARCH ENDEAVOR IS TO BETTER UNDERSTAND THE DYNAMICS OF COMMUNICATION AMONG FRIENDS. A FULL AND CAREFUL COMPLETION OF THE SURVEY SHOULD TAKE ABOUT 7 MINUTES. THANKS AGAIN!

**PLEASE NOTE THAT YOUR PARTICIPATION IS ENTIRELY VOLUNTARY, AND THAT RESPONSES WILL REMAIN ENTIRELY ANONYMOUS !**

College rank 1st year ____ Sophomore____ Junior____ Senior _____
(check one please)

Sex (check one please) _____ Female _____ Male

Age _____ (write it in)

Major (write it in) _____

***In order to participate, please carefully read the following dialogue***

---

**This scene takes place at a large college in Illinois, as Rachel and Michael are leaving their Economics 101 course on the way to get lunch together. Earlier in the week, the two friends decided to begin studying for their Economics final exam over lunch. Rachel and Michael live on the same floor of the largest dormitory at the college, have several mutual friends, and have been pretty good (non-romantic) friends for about a month.**

---

**R/M:** Class was pretty interesting today, don't you think?

**M/R:** Yeah, it wasn't too bad, but I was feeling pretty dead.

**R/M:** Not enough sleep?

**M/R:** Yeah, I stayed up watching all of Letterman last night.

**R/M:** So was it worth it?

**M/R:** I don't know if it was worth it, but Dave was funny, and some stand-up comedian I never heard of was on, and he was hilarious.

**R/M:** Do you remember the comedian's name?

**M/R:** No, but I do remember some of his funnier stuff. He was telling jokes about Desert Storm, and I remember he said that women with PMS make the best desert soldiers since they've got two humps, retain water, and are mean as hell.

**R/M:** (Looking a little irritated). You really thought that was funny? It just seemed like a slam against women to me. I guess I should be happy I didn't stay up to watch it.
OR...
**R/M:** (Smiling and quietly laughing) That's pretty funny. Sounds like I missed a pretty good show.

**Please turn the page over**

*** Now based on the scene you just read, please answer the following questions.**

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Very Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Slightly Disagree | Neither Agree nor Disagree | Slightly Agree | Agree | Very Strongly Agree |

_____ Michael seemed like a likable person

_____ Rachel seemed like a likable person.

_____ Michael seemed to express himself clearly.

_____ Rachel seemed to express herself clearly.

_____ Michael seemed trustworthy.

_____ Rachel seemed trustworthy.

_____ Michael seemed assertive.

_____ Rachel seemed assertive.

_____ Michael seemed to be interested in the conversation.

_____ Rachel seemed to be interested in the conversation.

_____ Michael seemed to be awkward in the conversation.

_____ Rachel seemed to be awkward in the conversation.

_____ Michael seemed to find it difficult to express his true feelings.

_____ Rachel seemed to find it difficult to express her true feelings.

_____ Michael seemed to ignore Rachel's feelings.

_____ Rachel seemed to ignore Michael's feeling.

_____ Michael seemed to lack self-confidence.

_____ Rachel seemed to lack self-confidence.



**PLEASE TURN OVER THE PAGE TO FINISH ANSWERING THE FINAL QUESTIONS !**

| 1 Very Strongly Disagree | 2 Disagree | 3 Slightly Disagree | 4 Neither Agree nor Disagree | 5 Slightly Agree | 6 Agree | 7 Very Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

_____ Michael seemed to be an effective conversationalist.

_____ Rachel seemed to be an effective conversationalist.

_____ Michael seemed shy.

_____ Rachel seemed shy.

_____ Michael seemed to be a competent communicator.

_____ Rachel seemed to be a competent communicator.

_____ Michael seemed respectful of Rachel.

_____ Rachel seemed respectful of Michael.

_____ Michael seemed to understand Rachel.

_____ Rachel seemed to understand Michael.

_____ Michael seemed to be sensitive to the needs and feelings of Rachel.

_____ Rachel seemed to be sensitive to the needs and feelings of Michael.

_____ Michael seemed to have a good sense of humor.

_____ Rachel seemed to have a good sense of humor.

_____ Michael seems to be the kind of person who could be a friend of mine.

_____ Rachel seems to be the kind of person who could be a friend of mine.

_____ Michael seems like he would fit into my circle of friends.

_____ Rachel seems like she would fit into my circle of friends.

_____ Michael seems like a person I would enjoy chatting with.

_____ Rachel seems like a person I would enjoy chatting with.

_____ The "the Desert storm joke" told in the scene was funny.

THANK YOU SO MUCH!!! YOUR COOPERATION HAS BEEN GREATLY APPRECIATED!

Table 1

ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE SUMMARY FOR COMPETENCE

| | Rachel's Competence | | | Michael's competence | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Source | df | F | signif. | df | F | signif. |
| Model | 5 | 1.93 | .091 | 5 | 8.13 | .0001 |
| Funny/No Funny | 1 | 4.87 | .029 | 2 | 6.91 | .009 |
| Version | 3 | 1.48 | .222 | 3 | 3.70 | .013 |
| Sex (of respondent) | 1 | .14 | .707 | 1 | 6.79 | .010 |
| Funny/NF x Version | 3 | .72 | .541 | 3 | 4.32 | .006 |
| Funny/NF x Sex | 1 | 1.81 | .181 | 1 | 4.34 | .046 |
| Version x Sex | 3 | .56 | .642 | 3 | .74 | .527 |
| Funny/NF x Sex x Version | 3 | 1.20 | .311 | 3 | .26 | .851 |

Table 2

ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE SUMMARY FOR SOCIAL ATTRACTION

| | Rachel's attractiveness | | | Michael's attractiveness | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Source | df | F | signif. | df | F | signif. |
| Model | 5 | 3.38 | .002 | 5 | 5.60 | .0001 |
| Funny/No Funny | 1 | 9.59 | .002 | 2 | 5.77 | .017 |
| Version | 3 | 2.61 | .053 | 3 | 8.34 | .0001 |
| Sex (of respondent) | 1 | 2.46 | .119 | 1 | 1.47 | .227 |
| Funny/NF x Version | 3 | 2.87 | .038 | 3 | 10.66 | .0001 |
| Funny/NF x Sex | 1 | 1.31 | .254 | 1 | .68 | .410 |
| Version x Sex | 3 | .19 | .903 | 3 | .43 | .735 |
| Funny/NF x Sex x Version | 3 | 1.20 | .311 | 3 | 2.01 | .113 |

Table 3
MICHAEL'S MEAN COMPETENCE RATINGS FOR VERSIONS

| | version 1 | version 2 | version 3 | version 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| * overall | 4.61[abcd] (n=58) | 4.94[abd] (n=52) | 4.44[acd] (n=47) | 4.69[abcd] (n=49) |
| female respondents | 4.72 (n=32) | 4.95 (n=29) | 4.60 (n=24) | 4.87 (n=25) |
| male respondents | 4.48 (n=26) | 4.93 (n=23) | 4.28 (n=23) | 4.51 (n=24) |
| perceived funny | 5.06 (n=25) | 4.90 (n=31) | 4.55 (n=26) | 4.67 (n=29) |
| *perceived no funny | 4.28[acd] (n=33) | 5.31[bd] (n=21) | 4.30[acd] (n=21) | 4.73[abcd] (n=20) |
| female x funny | 5.33 (n=13) | 5.21 (n=13) | 4.56 (n=14) | 5.06 (n=11) |
| male x funny | 4.97 (n=12) | 4.96 (n=15) | 4.48 (n=16) | 4.62 (n=15) |
| female x no funny | 4.44 (n=19) | 5.08 (n=13) | 4.56 (n=14) | 5.06 (n=11) |
| male x no funny | 4.06 (n=14) | 4.89 (n=08) | 3.80 (n=07) | 4.32 (n=09) |

Note: An * indicates that the effect is significant. For these variables, means that do not share the superscript are significantly different ($p < 0.05$) using a Scheffe post-hoc analysis.

Table 4
RACHEL'S MEAN COMPETENCE RATINGS FOR VERSIONS

| | version 1 | version 2 | version 3 | version 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| overall | 4.81 (n=58) | 5.02 (n=52) | 4.88 (n=47) | 4.73 (n=49) |
| female respondents | 4.82 (n=32) | 4.95 (n=29) | 4.98 (n=24) | 4.73 (n=25) |
| male respondents | 4.81 (n=26) | 5.11 (n=23) | 4.77 (n=23) | 4.73 (n=24) |
| perceived funny | 5.04 (n=25) | 5.16 (n=31) | 4.89 (n=26) | 4.75 (n=29) |
| perceived no funny | 4.64 (n=33) | 4.82 (n=21) | 4.87 (n=21) | 4.70 (n=20) |
| female x funny | 5.01 (n=13) | 5.26 (n=16) | 5.06 (n=10) | 4.83 (n=14) |
| male x funny | 5.07 (n=12) | 5.06 (n=15) | 4.74 (n=16) | 4.67 (n=09) |
| female x no funny | 4.12 (n=19) | 4.57 (n=13) | 4.93 (n=14) | 4.60 (n=11) |
| male x no funny | 4.58 (n=14) | 5.22 (n=08) | 4.74 (n=07) | 4.81 (n=09) |

Note: An * indicates that the effect is significant. For these variables, means that do not share the superscript are significantly different ($p < 0.05$) using a Scheffe post-hoc analysis.

Table 5
MICHAEL'S MEAN SOCIAL ATTRACTIVENESS RATINGS FOR VERSIONS

| | version 1 | version 2 | version 3 | version 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| * overall | 4.59[abc] (n=58) | 4.85[abc] (n=52) | 4.77[abc] (n=47) | 3.72[d] (n=49) |
| female respondents | 4.64 (n=32) | 5.09 (n=29) | 4.67 (n=24) | 3.81 (n=25) |
| male respondents | 4.54 (n=26) | 4.54 (n=23) | 4.87 (n=23) | 3.63 (n=24) |
| *perceived funny | 5.56[abc] (n=25) | 4.81[abc] (n=31) | 5.13[abc] (n=26) | 3.31[d] (n=29) |
| perceived no funny | 3.86 (n=33) | 4.90 (n=21) | 4.32 (n=21) | 4.32 (n=20) |
| female x funny | 5.87 (n=13) | 4.83 (n=16) | 5.20 (n=10) | 3.14 (n=14) |
| male x funny | 5.22 (n=12) | 4.78 (n=15) | 5.08 (n=16) | 3.47 (n=15) |
| female x no funny | 3.79 (n=19) | 5.41 (n=13) | 4.29 (n=14) | 4.67 (n=11) |
| male x no funny | 3.95 (n=14) | 4.08 (n=08) | 4.38 (n=07) | 3.89 (n=09) |

Note: An * indicates that the effect is significant. For these variables, means that do not share the superscript are significantly different ($p < 0.05$) using a Scheffe post-hoc analysis.

Table 6
RACHEL'S MEAN SOCIAL ATTRACTIVENESS RATINGS FOR VERSIONS

| | version 1 | version 2 | version 3 | version 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| overall | 4.90 (n=58) | 5.09 (n=52) | 4.46 (n=47) | 4.92 (n=48) |
| female respondents | 4.95 (n=32) | 5.07 (n=29) | 4.66 (n=24) | 5.08 (n=24) |
| male respondents | 4.83 (n=26) | 5.12 (n=23) | 4.25 (n=23) | 4.76 (n=24) |
| *perceived funny | $5.36^{abcd}$ (n=17) | $5.51^{abd}$ (n=16) | $4.32^{acd}$ (n=16) | $5.01^{abcd}$ (n=20) |
| perceived no funny | 4.20 (n=22) | 4.14 (n=12) | 5.08 (n=8) | 4.33 (n=5) |
| female x funny | 5.44 (n=13) | 5.73 (n=16) | 4.80 (n=10) | 5.19 (n=14) |
| male x funny | 5.28 (n=12) | 5.27 (n=15) | 4.02 (n=16) | 4.93 (n=15) |
| female x no funny | 4.61 (n=19) | 4.26 (n=13) | 4.57 (n=14) | 5.07 (n=10) |
| male x no funny | 4.45 (n=14) | 4.83 (n=08) | 4.76 (n=07) | 4.48 (n=09) |

Note: An * indicates that the effect is significant. For these variables, means that do not share the superscript are significantly different ($p < 0.05$) using a Scheffe post-hoc analysis.